00419

1968/09/04

ACTION

Wednesday, September 4, 1968

MEMORANDUM FOR THE PRESIDENT

Pres file

SUBJECT; Eugene Black's visit to Cambodia

The Cambodians have now informed us, through the Australians, that Prince Sihanouk said Black "would be welcome" in Cambodia between the 10th and the 14th of September. According to the Cambodian message, Black will be received as a guest of the government, will be met by the Prime Minister, and will be honored by a dinner hosted by the Acting Foreign Minister. Although the Cambodian message does not mention a meeting with Prince Sihanouk that, I believe, can be assumed.

Black will be leaving Washington at noon on Friday, September 6. He will be in Cambodia September 11 through 13.

Black will bring home to the Cambodians our grave concern over Communist military use of Cambodian territory. His instructions are now being drafted by the State Department. Marshall Wright will participate in this process and the instructions will, of course, be cleared with you prior to Black's departure.

One specific point: in the scenario approved earlier by you for the Black visit, it was planned that Black would not repeat not raise the question of the 11 American prisoners held by the Cambodians. As it now stands, there is a good chance that the Cambodians will release the prisoners prior to Black's arrival. However, if that does not happen, I suspect it is impractical and undesirable to have Black ignore the prisoner issue. First, the Cambodians will expect him to raise it, and could easily misinterpret his silence on the subject as an indication of high-level disinterest.

Second, should Black totally ignore this issue and that fact became public knowledge I really cannot conceive of a good public relations defense against the bitter criticism which would ensue. Finally, it would be quite like Sihanouk to plan now to release the prisoners to Black as a gesture of princely generosity. We would certainly not wish to queer any such plans by our disinterest. I do not think the prisoner issue need take much of Black's time, but I do question the wisdom of his ignoring it altogether.

When Black raises the question of Communist use of Cambodian territory, Sihanouk is almost certain to counter with a request for an American guarantee of Cambodia's borders. State has worked out a statement for Mr. Black's

contingency use with Sihanouk. The statement has the approval of our legal authorities and the Department of Defense, and should not cause much trouble with our Vietnamese and Thai allies. Black would indicate to Sihanouk our willingness to issue this statement in connection with a general improvement of US-Cambodian relations.

I think it is important that Black have with him a political advisor with broad knowledge of our Asian policies and problems. You might wish at the luncheon today to raise this point with Secretary Rusk and satisfy yourself with the adequacy of the staff being provided Black.

There will, of course, be great press interest in the Black trip. The public announcement of the visit to Cambodia will stress Mr. Black's development of the Mekong Valley. However, the primary purpose of his visit will become known and it would probably be wise to background with some candor on that aspect of Black's mission. We have under preparation both on-the-record and background guidance for use with the press and will submit these to you for approval before their use.

Finally, Black will be in town Friday morning prior to his departure. Now that his visit to Cambodia is a reality, I recommend you see Black again for a last-minute exchange of views and to arm his mission with a public demonstration of your personal interest.

W. W. Rostow

1. I will see Black on Friday morning.
   Approve_____Time_____
   Disapprove_____

   Have Secretary Rusk brief him.
   Approve_____Disapprove_____

2. Black should request the release of the American prisoners.
   Approve_____Disapprove_____

MWright:wpt

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